



Health Centers on the Front Lines of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment

HEALTH CENTERS ON THE FRONT LINES

As the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to spread, the national network of Community, Migrant, Homeless, and Public Housing Health Centers provides needed HIV/AIDS preventive and treatment services to medically vulnerable communities where primary care resources are scarce. Health centers serve as the health care home for **over 16 million* patients** through 6,000 urban and rural locations in every state and territory. They provide high-quality, affordable care regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. **Health centers offer HIV testing, health care, and counseling services for all patients.**

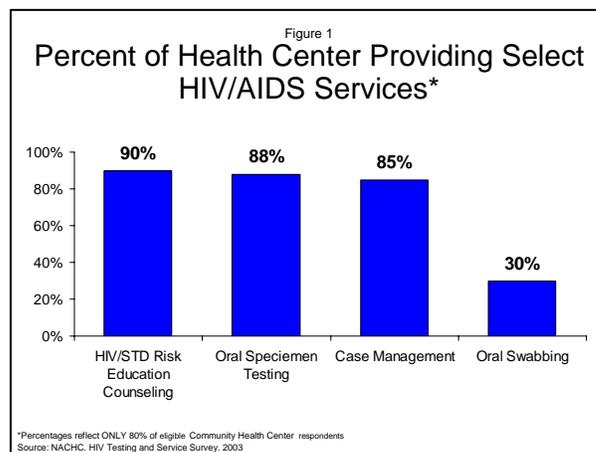
The federal Ryan White CARE Act (RWCA) program provides funding for low-income, uninsured, or underinsured people who are living with HIV/AIDS. The RWCA act is an important source of funding for treatment services, and provides direct funding to many Community Health Centers caring for patients with HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS ON THE RISE

After years of falling rates of AIDS diagnoses due to drug therapy, the number of individuals diagnosed with HIV/AIDS is again on the rise. In the United States AIDS diagnoses increased by 12% between 2004 and 2005. In 2005, the AIDS death toll reached nearly 18,000 people. An estimated 40,000 new HIV infections occur each year. In addition, the CDC reported in the June 2 issue of the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* that an estimated 25% of individuals living with HIV are not aware that they are infected and are therefore at risk of developing AIDS and unknowingly transmitting HIV. The proportion of HIV/AIDS cases among racial and ethnic minorities and women continues to rise. Many of these individuals live in communities served by health centers.

HEALTH CENTERS PROVIDING ESSENTIAL HIV/AIDS SERVICES

While nearly all health centers offer HIV testing and counseling onsite, according to the 2003 NACHC HIV Testing and Services Survey, more than **80% of health centers provide HIV-specific medical or social services onsite**. Over **90% of these health centers offer HIV/STD risk education, counseling and psychosocial evaluation** (Figure 1). Roughly, one third of health centers offer oral swabbing as opposed to blood samples for HIV/AIDS testing. In addition, more than 85% of health centers provide some kind of medical case management, prevention case management, or medical benefits counseling services. Furthermore, health centers provide a wide array of additional services to persons living with HIV/AIDS, including primary medical care, referrals to clinical trials, mental health counseling, oral health care, and case management. Lack of funding, low reimbursement for care, and lack of experienced staff were seen as the most significant barriers to enhancing HIV testing and treatment services.



HEALTH CENTERS AND THE RYAN WHITE CARE ACT

The RWCA is estimated to reach over 500,000 people annually. Title III of the RWCA delivers comprehensive primary health for people living with HIV, providing direct grants to 360 community-based clinics and public health providers in 49 States, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia and the Federated States of Micronesia.

According to the HIV/AIDS Bureau within the federal Health Resources and Services Administration, 69% of all RWCA clients are minorities and 33% of all RWCA clients are women. Further, the HIV/AIDS Bureau reports that of RWCA clients served in 2004, 72% had incomes at or below poverty, and 31% were uninsured. These populations reflect the overwhelming majority of health center patients— 64% of whom are people of color, 59% are women, 71% have incomes below the poverty level while nearly all are low-income, and 40% are uninsured.

National Association of Community Health Centers, Inc.

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* Includes patients of federally-funded health centers, non-federally funded health centers, and expected patient growth for 2006 and 2007.

Sources: NACHC 2007, based on 2005 Uniform Data System, BPHC, HRSA, DHHS. NACHC HIV Testing and Services Survey, 2003. Kaiser, HIV/AIDS Policy Fact Sheet, 2006. CDC, Fact Sheet HIV/AIDS, 2007. MMWR. 2006; Vol. 55. For more information, email research@nachc.com. This publication was supported by Grant/Cooperative Agreement Number U30CS00209 from the Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Primary Health Care (HRSA/BPHC). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HRSA/BPHC.